

gm

22 May 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: H.Con.Res. 80 - Persecution of the Jews in USSR

On the basis of the attached and pursuant to his request of yesterday, advised David Muchow, Bureau of the Budget, that the factual reports made in previous years by the Agency on the subject of H.Con.Res. 80 (persecution of the Jews in the USSR) are still applicable with the addition that in the summer of 1968 there had been a publication and distribution of some 10,000 prayer books. Mr. Muchow asked if we would have any problems with State's position against Government action condemning the USSR, and in favor of persuasion through private means. I told him it would be inappropriate for us to comment on the foreign policy aspects involved, which he seemed to appreciate.

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Assistant Legislative Counsel

Att

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OLC/LLM:rw:cd (23 May 1969)

CRC, 3/27/2003

Update for p. 2

A small edition (3,000 copies) of the Jewish prayerbook was published in 1958, and finally, after repeated promises, another edition (10,000) was printed 10 years later. This reportedly was issued to the Moscow Central Synagogue in the summer of 1968, and is said to be in process of distribution now. A small edition of a Jewish calendar--in Russian and Hebrew--was also printed in 1968.

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Remarks:

Attached are some comments on the position of the Jewish community in the USSR, in response to the request made yesterday through the Office of the Legislative Counsel. The material can be used on an unclassified basis.

Only sent to Legis Council 23 Jan

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23 January 1968

The Position of Jews in the USSR

Jews in the Soviet Union are in the unique position of being officially regarded both as a nationality and as a religious group. This duality complicates their status in an officially atheistic country where any attack on the Jewish religion becomes inseparable from an attack on the Jewish nationality as a whole. Their vulnerability is increased by the fact that they are widely scattered throughout the Soviet Union, unlike most other nationalities which have their own territorial homelands. They are also the only Soviet nationality with a majority of its total world population living outside the USSR--a fact which does little to allay regime suspicions of Jewish cultural and religious traditions.

Neither as a nationality nor as a religious group do Jews receive the rights granted other such groups in the USSR. In the last Soviet census 2,268,000 people specified their nationality as Jewish. This is about one percent of the total Soviet population and ranks the Jews 12th in number among the more than 100 nationalities in the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, it is the only nationality which does not have schools taught in its national language. There are no newspapers published in Yiddish although the Maris--a tiny primitive Asian group of about 205,000--have 17 newspapers and the Yakuts--a similar small Asian group of about 236,000--have 28 newspapers. A literary magazine which began publication in 1961 as a bimonthly, and is now a monthly is the only regular Yiddish publication. Its contents are carefully conformist, lacking any flavor of a national culture, and it is printed in only 25,000 copies. A handful of amateur theatrical groups made up of Jews who band together after working hours exists on a marginal basis giving occasional concerts and readings in Yiddish. There is no state-supported Jewish theater, although government subsidies are given to other national theaters.

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All religions in the Soviet Union exist under difficulties, but Judaism is subject to special discrimination. Jewish congregations have not been allowed to establish any central organization, and have nothing comparable to the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church or the Moslem Board for Central Asia and Kazakhstan. Bibles, hymnals and prayerbooks for the other "recognized" religions are printed fairly regularly. There have been repeated promises by regime spokesmen that a new edition of the Jewish prayerbook would be allowed, but none has been produced since a small edition (3,000 copies) in 1958. The other major ecclesiastical bodies are authorized to produce a variety of religious articles such as church vessels, vestments or crucifixes. The production of prayer shawls and phylacteries is prohibited to Jews. For the estimated 40,000,000 Russian Orthodox there are about 20,000 churches (a ratio of 1 to 2,000). For the 3,000,000 Baptists there are roughly 6,000 parishes (or 1 to 500). For the estimated 1,000,000 Jewish believers, however, there are only between 60 and 70 synagogues (or 1 for each 14,000 believers).

Most religious groups maintain educational institutions for the priesthood. The Russian Orthodox have two academies and 5 seminaries; the Moslems have a madrassa. A yeshiva was established in Moscow in 1957, but fewer than five rabbis were ever graduated. A recent visitor was told that no rabbis are now being trained there, due to difficulties encountered by would-be students in obtaining permission to live in Moscow. When a rabbi dies, the synagogue is closed.

For those Jews who wish to make their way as assimilated Soviet citizens, however, the prospects are not all black. While they have lost the strong position at top levels of the Communist Party which they held after the Revolution and are virtually excluded from "sensitive" areas of the bureaucracy and the army, they are well represented in artistic and professional circles. Jews probably have a higher income than other groups, although it is something of a disadvantage in career terms to be

Jewish

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Jewish. Many liberal Soviet intellectuals have reacted against the long history of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union by emphasizing their sympathy with the victims of discrimination.

In recent years many young Jews have crowded into the synagogues and massed in the streets outside for celebrations of Simkhat Torah or Rosh Hashanah. Their participation is probably due at least as much to a longing for color and animation amidst the drabness of Soviet life and to a youthful search for identity as to formal religious beliefs. There were many reports of privately expressed pride in and identification with Israel at the time of the Arab-Israeli war last June. 1967.

The official Soviet position of support for the Arabs during and since the war lent indirect support to the latent popular anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union and resulted in more open expressions of prejudice in private conversations. Isolated anti-Semitic incidents were reported to have occurred during June but there is no evidence that the regime sponsored actions against Soviet Jews.

91ST CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. CON. RES. 80

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY 14, 1969

Mr. ANNUNZIO submitted the following concurrent resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

Whereas the Congress of the United States deeply believes in freedom of religion for all people and is opposed to infringement of this freedom anywhere in the world; and

Whereas abundant evidence has made clear that the Government of the Soviet Union is persecuting Jewish citizens by singling them out for extreme punishment for alleged economic offenses, by confiscating synagogues, by closing Jewish cemeteries, by arresting rabbis and lay religious leaders, by curtailing religious observances, by discriminating against Jews in cultural activities and access to higher education, by imposing restrictions that prevent the reuniting of Jews with their families in other lands, and by other acts that oppress Jews in the free exercise of their faith; and

Whereas the Soviet Union has a clear opportunity to match the words of its constitutional guarantees of freedom of re-

ligion with specific actions so that the world may know whether there is a genuine hope for a new day of better understanding among all people: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate*
2 *concurring)*, That it is the sense of the Congress that perse-
3 cution of any persons because of their religion by the Soviet
4 Union be condemned, and that the Soviet Union in the
5 name of decency and humanity cease executing persons for
6 alleged economic offenses, and fully permit the free exercise
7 of religion and the pursuit of culture by Jews and all others
8 within it borders.

91ST CONGRESS
1ST SESSION
H. CON. RES. 80

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

To express the sense of Congress against the persecution of persons by Soviet Russia because of their religion.

By Mr. ANNUNZIO

JANUARY 14, 1969

Referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs